

### **'Perfect storm of bad habits': Michelle Obama tells fat America to shape up**

A child obesity epidemic fed by fast food, sugary drinks and too much television threatens to create the first generation of American youths who live shorter lives than their parents, warns Michelle Obama.

The US first lady was keynote speaker at the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People's national convention in Kansas City on Monday.

She spent much of her half-hour address discussing her "Let's Move" initiative to combat child obesity.

Obama said the black community is hit especially hard by child obesity, in part because fresh fruits and vegetables often are not available in poor urban areas.

While she charmed the receptive audience with her quips about growing up in Chicago, she also took parents to task for letting their children spend an average of nearly six hours a day watching TV instead of being outside playing.

"In school, we had recess twice a day, gym class twice a week, like it or not," Obama said.

"When we got home, there was no way we'd be allowed to lie around the house watching TV. Our parents made us get up and play outside. We had to get up, get out, couldn't be inside."

The 46-year-old said that while she was growing up, her family rarely ate out, usually had meals as a family, and "we ate what we were served. My mother never cared whether me or my brother liked what was on our plates. We either ate what was there, or we didn't eat".

These days children are spending too much time in convenience stores, where they walk out with roughly 350 calories worth of food and beverages — sometimes two or three times a day, Obama said.

"Taken together, all of these things have made for a perfect storm of bad habits and unhealthy choices," Obama said. "It's a lifestyle that's dooming too many of our children to a lifetime of poor health and undermining our best efforts to build them a better future."

Her four-part "Let's Move" campaign calls for better labeling of foods at restaurants, improving the quality of food in schools, encouraging children to get more exercise

and making fresh fruits and vegetables available — and affordable — in all communities.

The US Department of Agriculture calls areas with little access to affordable and nutritious groceries "food deserts."

According to a 2007 study, 13 per cent of the nation's more than 3100 counties qualified as food deserts a decade ago.

The federal government has proposed spending \$US400 million a year to bring grocery stores and other healthy food retailers to under-served and rural communities, with a goal of eliminating food deserts within seven years.

"Surely the men and women of the NAACP haven't spent a century organising and advocating and working day and night, only to raise the first generation in history that might be on track to live shorter lives than did their parents," Ms Obama said.

Helen Pierce, an NAACP delegate from Fayetteville, North Carolina, said Obama's speech is a wake-up call to young people and their parents. Another delegate, Nathalie Bryant of Indianapolis, called the speech relevant to current circumstances related to overweight youths.

"What she said about food deserts, that's a really important issue that needs to be addressed," Bryant said

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